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WHOOPING CRANE COUNT REACHES THIRTY-ONE WITH SEVEN YOUNG

The heartening news that 31 whooping cranes have arrived on their wintering grounds at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas was announced today by Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall. Seven of the birds were young of the year, the largest number of young birds counted since the winter of 1958-59.

Twenty-eight adult whoopers were counted on the refuge in the spring of 1963. This raises hopes that at least four more of the big birds--America's living symbol of wildlife conservation--may still be enroute to their winter home, the Fish and Wildlife Service said.

"For once, a report on a population explosion is good news," Secretary Udall said. "The whooping crane has become a national emblem of a determined conservation effort to preserve an almost vanished species. The good news on the flock's growth is heartening evidence that thoughtful men can help undo the ravages of thoughtlessness."

There were 38 wild whoopers at Aransas in the fall of 1961. These 38 birds headed northward in the spring of 1962 but six failed to return to the refuge the following fall. Four of the 32 which did return could not be located by aerial flights over the refuge during the spring of 1963. Conservationists are hopeful that these four missing birds will also return this fall.

There are seven whooping cranes in captivity. Six of these are at the New Orleans Audubon Park Zoo, including the famous Crip and Josephine, and one is in the San Antonio, Texas, Zoo.

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